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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0317/01 0782153
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 192153Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3351
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000317

SIPDIS

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FOR WHA/BSC

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: EMBASSY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVENT
HIGHLIGHTS EFFORTS TO FIGHT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

¶1. Summary. Embassy Buenos Aires celebrated International Women's Day the week of March 8th with a variety of events and two op-eds centered around the UN theme of "women and men united to end violence against women and girls." On March 10, the Ambassador, accompanied by Buenos Aires Provincial Governor Daniel Scioli, visited and donated equipment to a domestic violence shelter in La Plata, Buenos Aires. The donation was made possible thanks to a grant from Southern Command's Minimal Cost Assistance Program. In the afternoon, Embassy hosted a reception for over 100 women leaders and honored the Mission's International Woman of Courage nominee and a female Federal Police chief for their outstanding work in fighting violence against women. Secretary Clinton's op-ed placed in the largest circulation paper in the Spanish-speaking world, "Clarín," and the Ambassador's op-ed carried in "La Nación" -- meaning that in one single week, the U.S. message on domestic violence reached all readers of the country's major papers. Press coverage of the events helped raise public awareness of USG commitment to work with partners to eradicate all forms of violence against women. Several women legislators left our reception directly to help pass a new law targeting violence against women. The Ambassador subsequently issued a statement congratulating congress for passing the law and wrote to congratulate the legislators who led the successful effort to enact the legislation. End Summary.

¶2. Post kicked off its International Women's Day events with the publication of the Ambassador's editorial on domestic violence in paper-of-record "La Nación" on March 10. Under the title "Peace Begins at Home," the Ambassador noted women's contributions to society and highlighted that much work remains to be done to create a world free of gender-based violence. The editorial commended the Argentine government for adopting noteworthy measures to combat violence against women, such as the Supreme Court's Office of Domestic Violence, which has already assisted over 2,172 domestic violence victims in Buenos Aires city since its inauguration in September 2008. It also mentioned the Federal Police's Crime Victims Division and the Prosecutor General's unit for Crimes Against Sexual Integrity for their efforts to help victims as well as an emergency hotline administered by the Ministry of Justice's Victims Against Violence program. The editorial praised the work of activists Dario Witt and IWOC nominee Nelida Borquez to underscore the message that men and women must work together to build a world free of gender-based violence.

¶3. Later that morning, the Ambassador, accompanied by Buenos Aires Provincial Governor Daniel Scioli and La Plata Mayor Pablo Bruera, visited Casa Abierta Maria Pueblo, a domestic violence shelter in La Plata, Buenos Aires. The shelter is run by Ashoka Fellow Dario Witt. Himself a survivor of family violence, Dario established a domestic violence shelter in 1997 that provides shelter as well as legal and counseling services. His team offers workshops to empower victims by informing them of their rights, strengthening their decision-making skills, and boosting their self-confidence. Since its founding, the shelter has assisted over 18,000 women and children. Dario, who has received over 25 death threats, also works with abusers to rehabilitate them and prevent future violence.

After touring the facilities and listening to victims' experiences, the Ambassador donated a washer, dryer, beds, pillows, plates, and utensils to the shelter. The donation was made possible thanks to a Minimal Cost Assistance Program grant provided by U.S. Southern Command through the Embassy's Military Group.

14. In the afternoon, the Ambassador hosted a reception for over 100 women leaders including a Vice President of the Supreme Court, the head of the Justice Ministry's anti-discrimination office and Argentina's most popular TV talk show host. At the event, he recognized two outstanding women leaders fighting domestic violence.

Both women were deeply moved by the recognition of their work. The first honoree, Ms. Felipa "Nelida" Borquez, was post's nominee for the Department's 2009 International Woman of Courage award. For more than 20 years, Ms. Borquez has championed women's rights to live free of domestic and sexual violence. As director for a network of domestic violence centers in La Matanza, she has launched a public awareness campaign to educate women that by law, they have the right to file domestic violence complaints at any police station, not just stations dedicated to women's issues.

15. The Ambassador also recognized Federal Police Commissioner Ester Mabel Franco for her initiative in creating the Federal Police's first center to assist victims of sexual violence. Established in 1995, this division collaborates in investigations to collect evidence for use by judicial officials to prosecute perpetrators of sexual assault. Recognizing that victims of sexual violence suffer trauma as they recount their experience during the investigative process, Franco has instituted procedures to instill confidence and trust between the victims and her police division. In 2008, her division filed the highest number of cases with the courts in ten years.

16. The Embassy's celebration of International Women's Day was widely played by Argentine national and provincial media. Largest-circulation newspaper "Clarín", pro-government "Página 12," regional newswire MERCOSUR Noticias, national wire service agency "Telam," Infobae, as well as provincial media like Radio del Plata, Diario Onco Matanza, and El Patagónico all carried stories on the day's events.

17. On March 12, Secretary Clinton's op-ed was the main opinion feature in the largest-circulation paper in the Spanish-speaking world, Clarín (circulation: 370,000), under the title "Improving the Condition of Women is to Bet on the Future." This placement, in addition to Ambassador Wayne's bylined op-ed carried in newspaper of record "La Nación" (circulation: 150,000) on March 10, meant that, in one single week, the U.S. message on domestic violence appeared in two separate editorials reaching all readers of the country's major papers. The double editorial placement in one week was a first for the Embassy, the most important part of the successful press coverage of our International Women's Day activities. Several members of Congress left the Embassy reception directly to vote in favor of a new law that addresses violence against women. The law was passed by the lower house of Congress March 11th and will now be enacted into law (as it had already been passed by the Senate). Ambassador subsequently issued a statement welcoming the new law and sent letter of congratulations to women legislators who lead the effort to pass the law.

Comment

18. The two op-eds and press coverage of Mission events helped raise public awareness of the problems of violence against women in Argentina, as well as the USG's commitment to work with partners to eradicate this scourge. Our recognition of the GOA's efforts in this area may enhance prospects for strengthened cooperation from the Argentine government to protect the victims, and punish the perpetrators, of this demeaning crime as well as to continue our work on a range of other important issues related to women.

WAYNE